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***THE BARNABITES***



**Manual of history and spirituality  
of the Order of Clerics Regular  
of St. Paul Beheaded**

# Chapter 18

1815 - 1870

## FROM THE REESTABLISHMENT OF THE ORDER TO THE VATICAN COUNCIL I

### **The Second Founder**

The new dawn of the Congregation coincides with a sunset: the death of St. Francis Xavier M. Bianchi. The apostle of Naples had prophesied the fall of Napoleon. The confreres of the Neapolitan Province, dressed as diocesan and free from the vow of poverty, were gathering around him as he assured them that the Congregation would be reestablished. His prediction was taking place when death came on January 31, 1815.

The previous year Fr. Fontana had reached Milan from his prison in Paris, and two days later he had written to Fr. Grandi: "I know of a notification published by the Holy Father, in which His Holiness reserves to himself the right to decide which Religious Orders would be reinstated. Therefore, it would be better to wait for his decision for our fate. But you, as General Procurator, could speed up the process and make an application as soon as possible, and try whatever you can to obtain an immediate decision, which I need for my views. I desire nothing but the reestablishment of our Congregation..."

Soon after he was called to Rome by Pius VII, who, on August 1814, published a Decree affirming the reestablishment of the Order and confirming Fr. Fontana as Superior General. He wrote to a confrere: "For me, I have satisfied my conscience... not to be negligent in the interest of the Congregation... nothing else is left to do but resign ourselves to whatever Divine Providence has disposed."

Divine Providence will use Fr. Fontana for the reestablishment of the Congregation, and because of this he is called the second founder for the XIX century. Many were the difficulties: how to get back the properties, and how to reach the 300 members, dispersed all over, many of them by now old or sick, while the young one had found already permanent solutions to their life. So in 1825 the reestablished Congregation could count on only 166 members.

### **The Slow Comeback**

"We congratulate the Barnabite Fathers - Pius VII said, talking about Fr. Fontana - because they have such a Superior!" In this expression we can catch one of the motives for the comeback of the Barnabites after the long and hard times which had taken place. It was not possible to make a sudden cut between the Order and the Holy See, since the Order was well inserted in the life of the Church creating its anchor of salvation.

Another reason was a civil one: our Congregation, especially in the last decades, had affirmed itself in the field of schools and education, even the Revolution had recognized the importance of education. We have seen how in Arpino, Bologna, and Lodi the Napoleonic laws had not been strictly applied to allow Fathers to run the schools. Now society, profoundly shaken at its foundation, found in the Barnabites a sure anchor.

In 1822 Cardinal Fontana died. By Pontifical decree Fr. Grandi became Vicar General, succeeded at his death by Fr. Duelli, who was the only Assistant General left. A General Chapter was needed, but how?

We have no documents from that Chapter, but the few Barnabites who were left, got together, and slowly houses were opened again with a tenacious a strong desire by them to survive and to be Barnabites. The new Superior General Fr. Scandellari, explained to the pope why they were refusing a merger of Barnabites and Theatines. They envisioned an increase of membership since both novitiates in Naples and Genoa had candidates.

In 1826 the situation started to look much better: the German province with four houses had not been touched by the revolution, Piedmont had six houses, and the Roman province, including Naples, had ten. The only question was about the Lombard Province.

### **The Lombard Province**

The first attempt, in 1814, to reestablish this Province was not successful because of the bureaucracy of the Austrian government.

In 1817 the Austrian government, following a second attempt, released a declaration about the usefulness of the Barnabites. This led to the following facts: in 1818, the Bishops were asked which Religious Orders they believed should be reestablished for the education of the youth, the assistance of the orphans, the sick, and the poor, and for the care of souls. The Emperor, in a meeting of June 15, 1819, decided in favor of the Barnabites, the Somascans, and the Oblates.

The Barnabites right away send a formal application to Cardinal Gaysruck of Milan, who there upon reminded them of the conditions: no ties with the Superior General, and they were supposed to submit a list of aids they expected from benefactors.

The first condition divided the Fathers, and unable to meet the second, they ran in a dilemma which they did not know how to solve. To get around the problem, the Fathers used an alumni of the Longone school, the Count Alphonse Castiglioni. In 1822 he petitioned the Emperor explaining how needed the Barnabites were in the field of education of the youth, assuring him to take upon his shoulders the responsibility of their material needs.

The Emperor communicated his approval to the Cardinal who, instead tried to find all kind of obstacles to stop the Fathers, but finally he had to give in granting his approval too.

Meanwhile Fr. Mantegazza had written to all the Barnabites in the Province asking about their availability. Only 16 answered. Too few and most of them were up in their years. Bishop Lambruschini wrote to him from Genoa: "Don't despair. Let us trust God, for whose honor and glory we work... Maybe there will be many Religious who, guided by their human feelings, will not be available to enter the Congregation, not to say that, forgetful of their duties, will offer a flat refusal. Don't be saddened by it. God needs no one... Few Barnabites, insofar as they are good and full of the spirit of the Congregation, will be enough to make it ride again" (February 10, 1823).

The death of Father Mantegazza on August 11, 1824, slowed down the process. Fr. Gajetan de Vecchi took over and in September of 1825 he saw the approval granted. On November 13, all the Barnabites gathered together in St. Alexander's to solemnly inaugurate the Lombard Province. This was followed by the reopening of St. Barnabas and of the Carrobiolo in Monza, where a group of Barnabites had stayed together although wearing the diocesan cassock.

## Reorganization

Up to now we have talked about the exterior events of this historical period of our Order. But what went on in the intimacy of the Congregation?

First of all the Congregation needed an updated Constitutions after two centuries since the first edition. This new edition was under the supervision of Fr. Ungarelli and was approved in 1882.

The reduced number of the members and the growing demands of the apostolate convinced the Congregation for Religious to dispense our Congregation from the choral office, except in the novitiates and the Community of St. Barnabas.

During this time the Church recognized in St. Joseph its special patron, therefore, the General Chapter of 1865 introduced the prayer to St. Joseph in the Barnabite evening prayers.

Toward the end of this period appears the outstanding personality of the Superior General Fr. Caccia. He was at the government of the Congregation for 17 years (1847-1853 / 1856-1867). He reintroduced the Barnabites North of the Alps opening a house in Paris in 1852.

## Theological School of St. Charles

For a rebirth of the Congregation, special attention was needed for the formation of young Barnabites. The theological school of St. Charles reached its highest glory during this period, source of so many outstanding scholars in sacred and secular sciences, like Frs. Grandi and Lambruschini. The faculty had illustrious scholars like Frs. Ungarelli, Vercellone, Bilio, which form men like Graniello, Bruzza, Denza, Tondini, Semeria.

## The “Oratori” or Youth Centers

While the Order was enriched by many famous preachers, like Cadolini and Piantoni, one of the most successful apostolate became the involvement with the youth as exemplified by Fr. Fortunato Redolfi's work. Born in 1777, he joined the Barnabites in Monza after the military service. He professed the vows in 1801 and was ordained a priest the following year. During the suppression working as a diocesan priest, he developed a vocation for the youth apostolate. He organized youth groups (oratori) in various places, until 1821 when he was among the first Barnabites to return to Monza, where he organized the famous Carrobiolo oratorio. Only three months after the inauguration the “oratorio” had 250 members. Very intense was the life of prayer centered on the Eucharist, the office of Our Lady, and catechism lessons. Our Lady of Sorrow became its Patroness.

The initiative radiated all over Lombardy and very appropriately Redolfi is considered the founder of this modern form of youth apostolate.

## The Fr. Villoresi Seminary

Fr. Redolfi died in 1851. His successor was Fr. Villoresi, who had already opened an oratorio for poor children, while the Carrobiolo was for well to do members, and he fused the two together.

A further transformation happened in 1862, when the oratorio was transformed into a seminary for poor clerics. The seminary was so successful that in 1883, at the death of Fr. Villoresi, it had 230 members.

The novice Fr. Semeria, writing to his mother, said: “In this last month (June) there have been a lot of news. First of all the death of Fr. Villoresi, religious in charge of the Carrobiolo in Monza, a true man of the Lord and of Divine Providence. Poor, and deprived of any human means, he created a seminary, where he has worked for more than 20 years as his Founder and Father, Spiritual Director, Professor, in the midst of most painful trials with which the Lord was pleased to try him. He did not die in Monza but in Fabbriola, a village in Brianza, while with his brother, a priest, on Sunday, June 17. Having received in Fabbriola the greatest tribute of prayers, affection, veneration, by the people and the clergy, he was transported to Monza on Tuesday evening. Although it was late in the evening and at a secret hour, still the square in front of the Carrobiolo was full of people: meantime in the church beautifully decorated, 200 clerics and many priests formed a long line with burning candles in their hands, creating a sharp contrast with the black and funeral drapes. Singing the Miserere they welcomed the body of Fr. Villoresi, and a crowd of people flooded the church. I have never seen a most beautiful and impressive spectacle. That long line of candles, which from the entrance was leading to the Sancta sanctorum, almost like leading to the throne of the Most High, that crowd in silence, devout, that singing... the whole thing gave a strong and indelible impression. The following day the true funeral was attended by more than 400 priests from the archdiocese, 200 seminarians from the Villoresi seminary, 50 from Milan, many Barnabites and the Chapter of the Cathedral with the whole people creating two lines for the procession from the church to the cemetery. Truly it was a real triumph...”

Don Bosco twice, in 1850 and 1868 went to visit the two institutes to study their method for a modern education of the youth.

### **Toward The Vatican Council I**

The suffering of the Congregation continued during the 1800's. In 1849 because of the Roman Republic Father General had to go in exile in Gaeta to find refuge. Again the army invaded St. Carlo ai Catinari, and the confreres, divided from them only by a wooden partition, could hear the soldiers screaming: “We want the blood of priests and monks.”

Some Barnabites, like Ugo Bassi, embraced the patriotic movement of Italy, and Fr. Gavazzi even created an independent church, the free Christian church in Italy, to justify his patriotic aspirations.

The life of the Congregation had overcome the trial of fire by the Napoleonic suppression, so she plowed forward with determination and serenity.

### **THE VATICAN COUNCIL I and CARDINAL BILIO**

“I do not know where we are heading, but I think that Your Holiness will have to convoke at the right time (which cannot be too far away) a General Council to condemn new errors, and to have faith to flourish again among the Christian people, to restore and strengthen ecclesiastical discipline which has become so weak in our days. The evils are general, therefore they demand general provisions,” Lambruschini wrote to Pius IX on May 15, 1849.

Speaking to another Barnabite, who will play a leading role in the Council itself, Pius IX acknowledges that it was the merit of Lambruschini “to have suggested, counseled,



inculcated the definition of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, and the convocation of the Vatican Council I.”

### **Cardinal Bilio**

He was born in Alexandria (Italy) in 1826, and entered the Barnabite Congregation at a very young age. He will become one of its most illustrious members, putting at the service of the Church all his qualities of mind and heart.

His contribution as consultor of the Holy Office and of the Congregation of the Index, and in the drafting and interpretation of the Syllabus, brought him to the attention of Pius IX, who was looking for trusted theologians for the preparation of the Vatican Council I, and so in 1866 he nominated Fr. Bilio a Cardinal.

The new Cardinal wrote to one of his friends: “The external change of the habit imposed on me against my will and although unworthy, with a positive order of our venerable Pontiff, for sure has not produced, and I hope will never produce any change in my heart; because I know too well my great misery and the grave duties coming with the sublime but formidable dignity as a cardinal.”

### **Vatican Council I**

Card. Bilio was elected president of the Dogma commission during the preparation and the actual Council. He was also one of the five Cardinals moderating the whole Council. Because of his moderation he attracted the admiration of all: “He vigorously affirmed the infallible magisterium of the Roman Pontiff; with wisdom and amiability he conquered the esteem and the love of 700 Fathers,” we read on a plaque in St. Carlo ai Catinari. A diary kept in the Vatican archives attest that it was Cardinal Bilio to draft the document about the Infallibility of the Pope.

It was Card. Bilio to be called on February 7, 1878, to the deathbed of Pius IX, and assisted him until his last breath.

During the Conclave many Cardinals were in his favor, but he had already prearranged a strong party in favor of Cardinal Pecci who was elected as Leo XIII. Unfortunately in 1884 he died at the young age of 58, victim of a rheumatic tetanus.

“I cannot find consolation,” the Pope exclaimed, as he found out about his death, “no, Cardinal Bilio is not any more on this earth; by he who knew well the needs of the Pope and of the Church, cannot forget them now in heaven; rather, with his prayers now he is able to give better help than he could have given here on earth with his cooperation.”

### **Other Barnabites At The Vatican I**

We must mention first of all Fr. Teppa, an official member as Superior General of the Order. Fr. Vercellone, famous Biblical scholar, was a member of the commission on “The East” and on the “Missions.” Fr. Capelli, pastor of St. Carlo, was a consultor for the Congregation of Bishops and Religious, and member of the commission on Religious Orders.

In this way the Barnabite presence at the Council, although numerically small, was significant at all levels thanks to these great personalities.